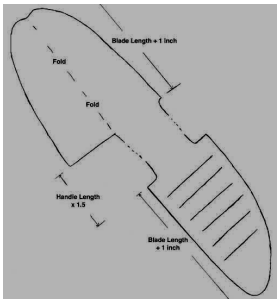
A Long-Term Survival Guide - Make A Primitive Survival Kit:

Here are some ideas, for a primitive survival kit that you can make. I like survival kits, and have many different kinds that I have put together over the years, but I wanted to make a kit that was based on primitive skills and improvised tools, so I came up with this collection of items, which make a unique and interesting low-tech kit, to add to my collection. You can make a similar kit, either for fun or display, but if you ever find yourself in a long-term survival situation with no gear, you can also use these ideas to assemble a primitive survival kit, from locally available materials. How "primitive" your kit should be is entirely up to you; there is nothing wrong with using scrap metal to make simple tools, but you can also make your kit using only stone tools, if you prefer.

A primitive survival kit should contain a cutting tool, such as these small flint knives.

The basic survival tool is the knife, and a crude knife can be improvised from flint or obsidian, broken glass, sharpened bone or bamboo, or any available metal, such as tin cans or road signs. Your knife blade can be set in the handle material you choose, using a commercial adhesive or epoxy, or you can use a mixture of pine pitch and charcoal, or glue made from boiling horn and hoof shavings.

Bamboo knives and spears are not as durable as stone or steel, but they cut and stab just as well.



One way to make a knife sheath is this simple design; it fits together with no stitching.

Your knife should have an improvised sheath, both for safety, and to protect the blade. I like the design shown above; you cut the pattern from leather or animal hide, then fold it up and slip it together, but you can also make a sheath from wood, bamboo, or discarded plastic containers.

Your kit can include a stone hatchet, for cutting poles, for shelters, and other camp structures.

A chopping tool is almost as important as a cutting tool, so a small hatchet is another good item to make for your primitive survival kit. Stone axe heads, set in short wooden handles, make decent chopping tools, but scrap metal can also be used, as shown below, to make a primitive hatchet.

This design for a primitive axe or hatchet uses a small metal blade, set in a hefty handle. The weight of the handle adds some mass to the tool, for more effective chopping. A stick with a right-angle bend makes it easy to mount your blade, using sinew or rawhide lashings, which tighten as they dry.

Your chopping tool will receive a lot of impact stress while in use, so for maximum security the blade should be glued in place first, using natural or store-bought adhesives, then lashings should be added. If you don't have any sinew, rawhide, or gut to make self-tightening lashings from, you can use other cordage as lashings, and then coat the finished lashings with more adhesive, to lock them in place. This is also a good idea for your knife blades, spear heads, arrow heads, and fish spears.

Cordage can be made from plant fiber, vines, rawhide, gut, or sinew, and has many survival uses.

Once you have a way to cut and chop, you can make cordage, from available raw materials. Thread, fishing line, snares, nets, ropes, lashings and braided items (pack straps) are a few cordage examples.

Shown are cordage from yucca fiber, bone needles, and an agave leaf point with attached fibers.

Needles can be made from bone, antlers, or wood, and the yucca and agave plants have a natural needle growing at the end of each leaf, with strong fibers already attached; just detach it and sew.

The Inuit thimble is easily made from leather, or other heavy material.

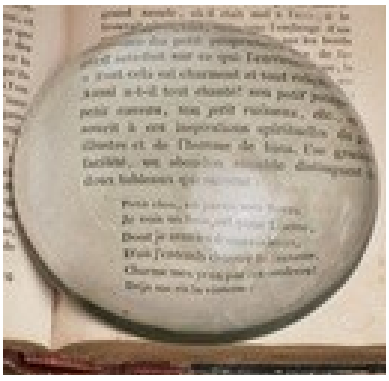
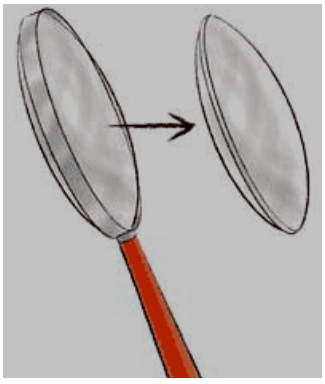
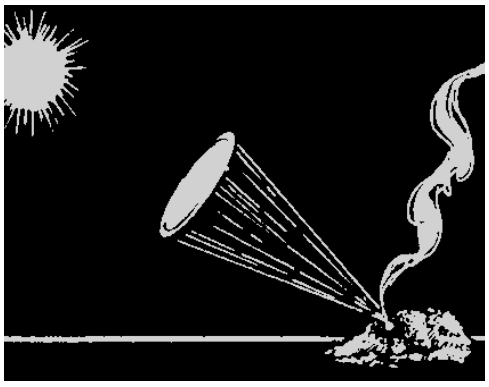
A simple design, the Inuit thimble, comes in handy when doing a lot of sewing and whittling.

Curved styles of primitive fish hooks can be carved from bone, antler, shell, or wood.

After making cordage, a logical next step is to make improvised fishhooks, to catch some food.

Gorge hooks (hidden in bait) turn crosswise when the line is tugged, after fish swallow them.

Once you catch some fish, and clean them with your knife, you will want to start a fire, to cook your dinner. There are a number of different primitive fire-starting tools, so you can decide which ones you want to add to your kit, or you could have one of each, for variety. Probably the easiest primitive method is sunlight-based, using a lens or reflector (I like these, but they only work on sunny days).

I keep the lens from a magnifying glass in my kit, for sunlight-based fire-starting.

You can make an improvised lens from clear ice, but it's hard to keep it from melting in your kit.

For a winter challenge, it is possible to start a fire with a lens made from clear ice, on a sunny winter day, but the ice has to be clear for this technique to work. Clear ice can be found alongside icy streams, or you can boil water before freezing, to get clear ice to practice with. The ice lens is not a tool that you can make and keep in your kit, but it is a fun and unusual cold-weather skill to learn.

Shown here are a parabolic reflector fire-starter, and an improvised version made from a flashlight.

Parabolic reflectors are a cool item to add to your kit, but they are hard to make in the wild. It is possible to polish the bottom of a soda or beer can enough to work, but doing so is a lot of effort.

I like to keep a flint stick in my kit (a wood or antler sheath can make them look more rustic).

Flint and fire steel is an ancient fire-starting method, but requires char cloth to work well. The steel is a piece of tempered high-carbon steel, which could be made from an old file, or an allen wrench. The flint can also be used for cutting, or a flint knife (or arrowhead) could double as your fire flint.

The fire steel is struck against the edge of the flint, as shown here, so that sparks ignite a bit of charred cloth, which is held under the thumb, on top of the flint. The glowing char cloth is placed inside a ball of fine tinder, called a “bird’s nest”, and then is gently blown upon, to cause the lit spot in the cloth to spread, and ignite the tinder ball. To work reliably, the char cloth must be kept dry.

A small can with a lid is a tool used for making char cloth. Cloth (from a cotton t-shirt) is cut into small squares, and then it is charred in the can, over campfire coals (a more primitive version of a char cloth maker, is both halves of a large clam shell, and mud or clay, to seal the edges).

A small fire piston is a unique tool to put in your primitive kit. (It is used to ignite char cloth.)

The fire piston is a small tool used for igniting a tiny bit of char cloth, which is held in a small recess at the end of the plunger. Fire pistons are hard to make in the field, but they are a lot of fun to use.

Fire Drill: A small fire drill set, like the one shown above, is another fire-starting tool to add to your primitive survival kit. Forked antler sections make good pivot blocks for such a fire drill, and using two sticks tied together is another way to make the hearthboard part of the fire drill set. I like the two-stick hearthboard technique better than the traditional hearthboard made from a flat piece of wood with a notch cut into the burned spot. It takes less effort to make, and works just as well.

Forked antler sections, used as fire drill pivot blocks, and the two-stick hearthboard.

Strips of birch bark, or cedar bark, can be rolled up and used as improvised torches.

Once you have one (or more) ways to start a fire, you can cook food, but you can also make your own torches and lamps, for improvised lighting. Birch bark and cedar bark make the best torches, and the three traditional fuels for oil lamps have always been animal fats, olive oil, and coconut oil.

Shells make good improvised oil lamps, using a crude wick and some flammable oil.

Many rocks can be used as lamps, after pecking and grinding a shallow depression into them.

Sap ball fire-starter

Wax ball fire-starter

You can make your own firestarters, by shredding up cedar bark, birch bark, or other dry tinder, and then mixing it with evergreen pitch, beeswax, or paraffin, and then rolling it into small balls. These simple little fire-starting aids can be a real lifesaver, when you really need a fire, in wet conditions.

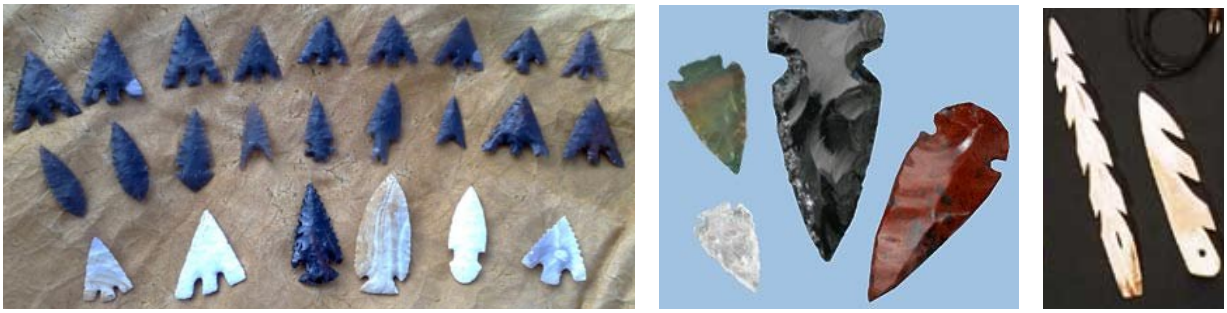
Pitch sticks, like these examples, are used to store a pitch and charcoal adhesive.

Pitch sticks are another useful primitive tool. They are made by melting evergreen pitch, and mixing it with ground charcoal, then rolling balls of the mix onto sticks, and letting them cool. The pitch is heated enough to melt, when needed, and used to mount arrowheads, or glue lashings together.

The pitch mix can also be stored in a small bamboo or reed tube, until needed.

A sling is a good weapon for the survival kit; it takes up little space, and ammo is everywhere.

Hunting tools: The easy way to make primitive spears, arrows, and fishing spears, is to keep a supply of already finished spear heads and arrow heads in your primitive survival kit. This way the hunting tools are already half-finished. Just lash the tool heads onto suitable shafts, and make a bundle bow.



A selection of arrowheads, spear heads, and spear-fishing spear heads can enhance your kit.

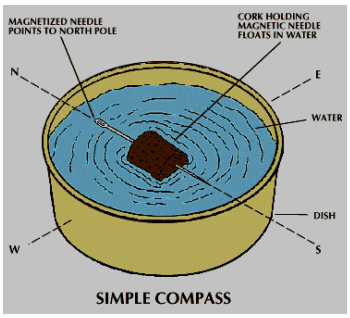
If you don't have any flint or obsidian in your area, you can make arrow points and spear heads from bones. Glass arrowheads can also be made from the bottoms of discarded beer bottles, as shown below. Arrowheads can also be made from tin can lids, just fold them in half, flatten with a stone, fold and flatten two more times (to make a triangle shape), and then finish, by sharpening the edges.

The bottoms of discarded beer bottles can be worked into arrowheads, with a bit of practice.

If you have finished arrowheads in your kit, making hunting tools is faster and easier.

Your arrows and spears can be made from steel, if you prefer. I like to make them out of spade drill bits, by grinding them to a point. These are light enough to be used as arrowheads, and tough enough to use as spearheads. They can be mounted on wood or bamboo arrows by drilling a socket into the end of the arrow shaft, and can be mounted onto synthetic arrows, by using a short length of metal tubing, which is just the right size to fit over the arrow shaft, and arrowhead shaft (I get mine from the hardware store, in the hobby section). These arrows should be secured with glue, and lashings.

I like this design for a fishing spearhead, made from three tines and a base, and lashings.



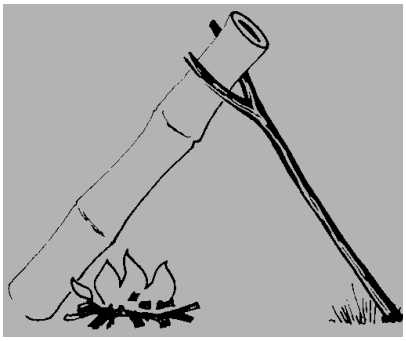
Compass: An improvised compass can be made from a needle floating in a cork, or on a leaf.

Canteen: Your survival kit should include a canteen, like these gourd and bamboo examples.

Water skin: A water skin can be made from an animal hide, or you can use a store-bought bota.

Carved wooden spoons, and shell spoon with stick handle.

Eating utensils can be made from wood, by carving and sanding. Cups and bowls can be fashioned from wood in the same way, to create an improvised mess kit. Coconut shells and bamboo sections are good tropical utensil materials, and spoons can be made from small shells with wooden handles.



Carved wooden cup, coconut shell cup, and one way to make a bamboo cooking pot.

Your primitive survival kit can be stored in an animal skin bag, leather pouch, or a gourd container.

Containers: You need some kind of container to hold your kit, which can be an animal skin bag, or a leather drawstring pouch, or a hard-sided container made from a gourd, or a large section of bamboo. Small items can be kept in little containers made from shells, or small, shell-like sections of gourds.

Here two pieces of a gourd, secured with a leather thong, are used to hold small items.

Awl and knapping tools, made from antler sections, and a flat sanding stone.

Misc: A pointed section of antler makes a good awl for making holes in leather, and for rope-work, and a blunt antler makes a baton, for flint-knapping. Another handy tool is a sanding stone, which is made by gluing a layer of sand onto a flat rock, and is used for smoothing wood, like sandpaper.

These kit items and containers are only suggestions, as you can customize the contents of your own primitive survival kits to include any other items that you wish. Kits such as these could contain magnesium fire-starters, coils of snare wire, plastic fresnel lenses, steel fishhooks, wire-rope cable-lock game snares, steel knives and hatchets, and a small compass (unless you consider these items as too “modern” to fit into the primitive theme). A kit containing these simple items, and knowing how to use them, can make it easier to survive an emergency.

The other “tool” to always carry with your survival gear is knowledge. If you know how, you can use these simple tools to build shelters, and catch and cook fish and game, but you can also construct other simple tools, traps, and camp equipment, to make your life easier. You can make digging tools, hammering tools, leverage tools, and all kinds of boats, bridges, & towers. The more simple designs and techniques you know, the better your standard of living can be, in a long-term survival situation.

I also like to carry a notebook, containing sketches of trap designs and improvised camp equipment, to use as a handy reference guide. This way you don’t have to remember everything, when stressed.